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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 009486

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SUBJECT: PM SINGH ABLY DEFENDS RECIPROCAL NATURE OF INDO/US
AGREEMENT IN PARLIAMENT

Classified By: Political Counselor Geoff Pyatt, for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (C) Summary: The BJP latched onto a leftist Parliamentary question on the July 18 civil nuclear agreement in an attempt to score points against the UPA. BJP heavyweights Yashwant Sinha (former Foreign Minister) and Sushma Swaraj asserted that the agreement was "stalelated," and that the US was pressuring India regarding its civil nuclear facilities and tacking on added conditions. After a Minister of State for External Affairs fumbled his response, the PM personally intervened, asserting that the agreement was fully reciprocal, was making good progress, and that India's actions regarding its civil nuclear facilities were completely voluntary. Afterwards, MPs from Congress and the BJP praised the PM's robust performance. The July 18 Agreement holds little political resonance for the opposition, as it is too complex, and most Indians support its implementation. The BJP has apparently decided to concentrate on simpler issues, such as bribery scandals, that have more traction in Parliament and in the media. End Summary.

The Left Launches the Attack

¶2. (U) The July 18 civil-nuclear agreement came back to the floor of Parliament on December 15 when Manoj Bhattacharya, a Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) MP asked whether the US administration has been seeking more concessions and "placing the burden of meeting conditions associated with the Indo-US Nuclear deal entirely on India?" Although the Left submitted the query, the BJP immediately jumped-in. Former Minister Yashwant Sinha and BJP delegation leader Sushma Swaraj Sinha queried the Congress bench regarding purported press

statements by U/S Burns that India should first begin to carry out its obligations if it wanted US cooperation in civil nuclear energy, and asserted that the process was in "stalemate."

And the PM Saves the Day

13. (U) Minister of State Rao Inderjit Singh attempted to reply on behalf of the PM, but bungled his statement halfway through. PM Singh then personally replied, stating "We expect a close correlation between the action to be taken by the US and India, and that Indian actions will be contingent at every stage on actions taken by the other side. Therefore, the question of the US administration asking for more concessions to be made by India and placing the burden of fulfilling commitments contained in the Joint Statement entirely on India does not arise. ... If the US does not carry out its obligations, we are also free not to carry out ours. ...The sides have expressed their views on the road ahead and are working to evolve a road map. ...Our position remains as conveyed by the Prime Minister to Parliament on July 29, 2005, that our commitments would be conditional upon, and reciprocal to the US fulfilling its side of the understanding, and we expect a close correlation between the actions to be taken by the US and India, and that India's action will be contingent at every stage on actions taken by the other side."

14. (U) The PM also denied that the US was exerting pressure on India, and asserted that India's decision to put certain

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nuclear facilities under international supervision was India's alone. Clarifying that the process was not "stalemated," the PM stated that there had recently been a "good meeting" of the Joint Working Group and that another meeting would take place "soon."

The PM Gets Good Marks

15. (C) Congress MP Rashid Alvi, who was present for the debate, told us on December 15 that the "atmosphere in the house" was good, in that the often-boisterous MPs listened respectfully to the PM's statements. Alvi concluded that the PM had done a credible job of refuting the opposition's attacks and "the Rajya Sabha sounded much satisfied by his balanced remarks." BJP MP SS Ahluwalia told us on December 15 that his party raised the issue because it was concerned about "various statements coming out of US government officials and Congressmen calling upon India to take steps without mentioning what the USG was doing." Ahluwalia confirmed that the BJP was "satisfied" with the PM's response.

Comment - A Difficult Yet Popular Issue to Grasp

16. (C) The BJP has been looking for issues it could use to score points in Parliament against the UPA, but the PM's December 15 Parliamentary performance indicates that the July 18 Agreement has failed to resonate. The issue is too complex to wrap around simple slogans, with most MP's not fully read-in on its complexities, even if it does produce emotional sound-bites that the Left and BJP can exploit in the media. Moreover, most Indians remain supportive of US-India nuclear cooperation. Since the agreement and its complexities are too esoteric for the Indian man in the street, yet largely supported by him, the BJP has apparently determined not to press it. The opposition prefers to work issues that fit more easily into the traditional Indian political framework, such as corruption scandals. The PM's solid performance belied earlier fears that he would not be up to the job of defending India's foreign policy in the rough and tumble of Parliamentary debate. He also proved that the contours of the agreement make good sense for both

the US and India.

17. (U) Visit New Delhi's Classified Website:
(<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/sa/newdelhi/>)
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